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STANDING COMMITTEE FOR PROGRAMME MATTERS
Inter-sessional meeting
6-10 May 1991, New York
Agenda item 6

DRAFT REPORT OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE FOR PROGRAMME MATTERS

Chairman-cum-Rapporteur: H.E. Mr. Ramiro PIRIZ-BALLON (Uruguay)

I. OPENING OF THE SESSION, ELECTION OF THE RAPPORTEUR, ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK

1. The Standing Committee for Programme Matters held its first inter-sessional meeting in New York from 6 to 10 May 1991. The President of the Governing Council, H.E. Mr. Ramiro Piriz-Ballon (Uruguay), served as Chairman of the Committee.

2. At its 1st meeting, on 6 May 1991, the Standing Committee approved the provisional agenda and organization of work contained in annexes I and II, respectively, to document DP/1991/SCPM/L.2. The Committee agreed to keep its schedule of work flexible and decided that the Chairman of the Committee should act as Rapporteur.

II. MID-TERM REVIEWS OF COUNTRY AND INTERCOUNTRY PROGRAMMES

3. For its consideration of this item the Standing Committee had before it documents DP/1991/6 and Add.1-8.

A. Summary of the discussion in the Committee

4. The Standing Committee resumed its consideration of selected mid-term reviews, begun at its first session in February. At that time, eight reviews were introduced to the Committee and discussion was completed on the reviews relating to the African region. The Committee took up this item again with

comments on the six remaining mid-term reviews. These were for the Arab States and European region, the regional programme and Yemen; for the Latin American and Caribbean region, Costa Rica and Jamaica; and for the Asia and Pacific region, Maldives and Pakistan.

5. Regional Programme for Arab States and Europe. The Committee noted and welcomed the emphasis on the environment. However, questions were raised about the proposal to assist in the establishment of a regional institute for environmental matters. It was felt that existing institutions should be supported to take on environmental issues. It was also pointed out that NGOs and other informal entities should be involved in the regional programme. The Committee was informed that a meeting would be held, probably in Rabat, from 8-10 July 1991 to discuss the proposed Centre (which Egypt has agreed to host). At that meeting, emphasis would be placed on networking.

6. Yemen. The decision of the mid-term review to shorten the ongoing programme by one year was welcomed. A narrower, sharper focus of UNDP resources was also favoured. Concern was expressed at the review's finding that the provision of counterparts had proven to be a problem. Reference was also made to the reported weakness of agency backstopping in some cases.

7. It was suggested that UNDP should take more of a leading role in the policy dialogue. The question was raised as to the effects on the country programme of the unification of the country and the implications thereof for the next cycle.

8. In reply, the Standing Committee was informed that a round table conference was foreseen for Yemen. This would address, inter alia, the issues raised by the Committee. It was also anticipated that the next country programme would be more focused than previous programmes.

9. Costa Rica. Concern was expressed at the apparent poor co-ordination among United Nations agencies. Concern was also expressed at the fragmentation of the programme. Queries were raised regarding the high percentage of equipment inputs as well as the socio-economic relevance of assistance to the National Museum. The lack of counterpart personnel was noted and the suggestion made that selection criteria for projects should be more rigorous. The comment was made that UNDP should concentrate its resources more on the policy dialogue than on specific projects.

10. It was pointed out that 10 of 23 projects originally foreseen in the country programme had not been taken up. Conversely, 9 unforeseen projects had been introduced. The question was raised whether this reflected deficiencies in the country programme as drawn up, or a shift in priorities.

Response of the Administration

11. In reply, the Committee was informed that the fragmentation of the programme was a direct consequence of the many demands made on UNDP cooperation and the limited IPF resources available. It was pointed out that

most equipment inputs pertained to projects that address the transfer and adaptation of technology.

12. In reference to the poor coordination indicated among United Nations agencies, the Committee was informed that, among other things, the implementation of the Special Plan for Economic Cooperation for Central America requires close coordination between multilateral, bilateral and subregional institutions. Nevertheless, the Resident Representative in Costa Rica would be requested to comment and provide additional examples of effective coordination at the field level. He would also be requested to take into account all the comments raised by the Committee in the forthcoming preparations of the fifth country programme, with special reference to the need for effective counterpart support and the areas to be selected for UNDP support, including the Costa Rican institutions which would receive assistance.

13. Finally, it was noted that the change in the projects included in the fourth country programme reflected a marked shift in national priorities caused by a change in government.

14. Jamaica. Discussion focused on the fact that only 50 per cent of IPF resources had been programmed when the review was held. Reference to co-financing was of little consequence if available funds were not utilized.

15. The fragmentation of UNDP resources was commented on. It was suggested that they should be focused on a limited number of objectives, particularly those where the UNDP comparative advantages could be exploited and the lessons of past experience applied. It was felt that UNDP should work closely with the Government in human resources development and public sector reform.

Response of the Administration

16. The Director, RBLAC, noted that in the Latin American and Caribbean region, UNDP was often called upon to finance pre- investment or pre-programme studies. These activities are primarily targeted at the subsequent attracting of cost-sharing resources.

17. The information contained in the report on IPF commitment at the time of the mid-term review was unfortunately not correct: the committee was informed that the entire IPF for the fourth cycle was currently committed. The precise status of the programming of the IPF at the time of the mid-term review would be contained in the revised annex to be issued as a corrigendum to the mid-term review report.

18. The areas of human resource development and private sector reform, in addition to the strengthening of the public sector management capacity, continued to be prime areas for emphasis in the Jamaica country programme. Continued efforts would also be undertaken to focus the programme increasingly on priority areas.

19. Maldives. Delegates welcomed the significant role of UNDP in the policy dialogue. Further involvement in environment, decentralization and the promotion of women was encouraged.

20. It was felt that UNDP had a special role to play in aid co-ordination in the Maldives. In that respect, it would be useful if other donors' complementary efforts could also be mentioned when reviewing UNDP activities. In fact, co-financing had been attracted to UNDP-supported projects. Reference was made to the UNDP Special Facility through which donors may contribute through UNDP to projects in the Maldives and clarification was sought on the purpose of this facility.

Response of the Administration

21. The Director, RBAP, welcomed the suggestion that other donor's activities also be considered in mid-term reviews of country programmes, especially that the UNDP Special Facility (Trust Fund for Maldives) was approved to assist the Government in attracting and utilizing small amounts of funding which may become available from bilateral sources by combining these resources in support of priority programmes and projects for which additional funding may be required.

22. Pakistan. It was noted that the country programme had undergone a significant shift in priorities. This reinforced the desirability of harmonization between the timing of the country programme and that of the national plan to avoid a gap or misalignment of priorities. It was also noted that 34 of the new projects approved related to projects not foreseen in the country programme and concern was expressed on this variation from the envisaged thrust and interest of the country programme.

23. Concern was expressed at the fragmentation of the programme which appeared to diminish impact. On the other hand, the emphasis on human development, including women in development, and the switch to higher national priorities were welcomed. Interest was expressed in the progress of and constraints to national execution.

Response of the Administration

24. In reply, the Regional Director explained that the large number of new projects approved which were not originally in the country programme was due to the large unallocated resources combined with the new emerging priorities in the social and fiscal sectors. The adoption of the programme approach will in the future reduce the number of projects in the country programme and will also greatly facilitate the systematic identification of new projects. Furthermore, the Government has already requested a one-year extension of the current country programme in order to bring it in line with the national development plan. A study to examine fully the issue of government capacity for national execution in Pakistan is currently under way.

Further discussion of the Committee

25. In addition to the country-specific issues raised, the following general points were made:

(a) Mid-term reviews are useful and important exercises. They can improve the quality and impact of UNDP technical cooperation by providing lessons to be fed into future programming. They also help the Governing Council to understand better how programmes work;

(b) Mid-term reviews should offer more information on links between UNDP projects and those funded by other donors;

(c) Mid-term reviews must be analytical rather than descriptive;

(d) When country programmes undergo major changes from the original, approved document, they should be brought to the attention of the Governing Council. In this context, the importance of flexibility in programming was also stressed. The Administrator confirmed that current procedure required that significant changes in the approved country programme be brought to the attention of the Council: indeed, the mid-term review reporting process would bring such cases before the Council;

(e) UNDP should reduce the fragmentation of its resources by focusing on a few, well-selected national objectives;

(f) UNDP should target its resources to areas and levels of intervention where it offers comparative advantages;

(g) In particular, UNDP should be an active partner in the national policy dialogue.

B. Recommendation of the Committee

26. The Standing Committee recommended that the Governing Council take note of the following mid-term reviews of country programmes under the fourth programming cycle: Regional Programme for Arab States and Europe (DP/1991/6/Add.8); Yemen (DP/1991/6/Add.7); Costa Rica (DP/1991/6/Add.2); Jamaica (DP/1991/6/Add.3); Maldives (DP/1991/6/Add.4); Pakistan (DP/1991/6/Add.6).

III. EVALUATIONS

27. For its consideration of this item the Standing Committee had before it documents DP/1991/17, DP/1991/22 and DP/1991/61.

A. Summary of the discussion in the Committee

1. The Social Dimensions of Adjustment Project

28. Delegates supported the need for the SDA programme to continue with major changes. The implications of including other agencies and UNDP acting as the secretariat has to be carefully worked out. One delegate felt that the report was biased in its criticism of the World Bank and that the use of International Development Association resources was justified.

2. Evaluation of NATCAPS

29. Delegates endorsed the overall recommendations contained in the report. The need for a comprehensive approach to national capacity-building, active involvement of bilateral donors, the possibility of extending the exercise to local and regional levels, and the need to ensure complementarity between structural adjustment programmes and NATCAPS were emphasized. Steps to put the recommendations into operation were called for; actions being taken were indicated by the Director, RBA.

3. Evaluation of UNDP assistance to intergovernmental organizations in Africa

30. The secretariat highlighted the problem of the proliferation of IGOs and consequent weaknesses in financial administrative capacity to achieve objectives noted in the report. It was generally felt by delegates that UNDP assistance must be concentrated on areas in which UNDP has a comparative advantage. Even though a long-term framework of assistance is needed, it should be worked out by the IGOs since UNDP of necessity has to work within the five-year programming cycles.

4. Capacity-building for aid coordination in the least developed countries

31. Delegations supported the findings and recommendations of the evaluation. It was, in particular, suggested that they be taken into account in the preparation and the implementation of country programmes in the fifth programming cycle. One donor stressed that in its effort to strengthen the LDC capacity for economic and aid coordination, UNDP should address the issues of effectiveness of the civil service, including incentives, remuneration and the use of domestic capacity.

5. Report of the Administrator on evaluation

32. Several delegations expressed appreciation for and interest in the report of the Administrator on evaluation (DP/1991/22). It was noted that the Governing Council would consider the report at its thirty-eighth session.

33. The issues of country programme evaluations, and the need for the evaluation of UNDP efforts in support of human development were raised, as was the need for thematic evaluations in support of Governing Council decision 90/34.

34. The Administrator confirmed UNDP support for a strategic approach to evaluation and noted that Governing Council decision 90/34 was already fully reflected in the work plan for evaluation in the fifth cycle.

35. The issue of follow-up to evaluation was raised and will be responded to at the thirty-eighth session of the Governing Council. Delegations expressed their support for UNDP efforts to develop national monitoring and evaluation capacity, and for the expanded use of ex-post evaluation and impact evaluation.

36. The Administrator thanked those delegations who had indicated support for the strengthening of evaluation in UNDP in the light of the focus on human development, national capacity-building and the six areas laid out in Governing Council decision 90/34. UNDP plans to strengthen evaluation are reflected in the Administrator's comments on the management consultants' report (DP/1991/51), which will be before the Governing Council at its thirty-eighth session.

B. Recommendation of the Committee

37. The Standing Committee decided to recommend to the Council to take note of the evaluations concerning the Social Dimensions of Adjustment project; the national technical cooperation assessments and programmes; UNDP assistance to intergovernmental organizations; and capacity-building for aid coordination in the least developed countries.

IV. PROGRAMME OF WORK FOR 1991, INCLUDING FIELD VISITS TO TAKE PLACE IN THE SECOND HALF OF 1991

38. For its consideration of this item the Standing Committee had before it documents DP/1991/SCPM/L.1 and DP/1991/SCPM/1.

39. The Standing Committee for Programme Matters discussed its programme of work for the thirty-eighth session as contained in document DP/1991/SCPM/L.1. Bearing in mind the large number of country programmes which the Standing Committee will have to consider in 1992, members commented on the guidelines for the preparation of country programmes and suggestions were made as to

elements in future guidelines. The Secretariat made the present guidelines for Advisory Notes available.

40. The discussion of the Standing Committee concerning its field visits involved the broad participation of members. The discussion centred on the following questions: objectives, organization of visits, selection of themes or topics, reporting to the Standing Committee, composition, periodicity and timing. The Secretariat was asked to prepare a draft terms of reference for the thirty-eighth session in the light of the views expressed during the deliberations of the Standing Committee as well as during informal consultations.

V. OTHER MATTERS: UNDP GULF TASK FORCE

41. Delegations commended the work of the Gulf Task Force, its rapid response to the crisis and the quality of the documentation. Several delegations hoped that updated material on the impact of the crisis would be made available to the Governing Council at its thirty-seventh session. Some delegations also noted the importance of going beyond immediate humanitarian needs towards sustainable solutions to the medium- and long-term problems created by the crisis.

42. A few delegations requested more information on UNDP work at the field level, and on its role within the United Nations inter-agency effort. One delegation asked about activities in response to the need of Iraqi refugees. Two delegations reaffirmed that the impact of the Gulf crisis had reached beyond the immediate region, and urged that South Asian countries be included in the SPR allocations to enable them to respond to the needs created; for example, to reintegrate returning labour migrants. Several other delegations also described the impact of the crisis on their countries and the need for SPR resources to enable them to respond; some noted that requests from their countries were forthcoming.

43. One delegation emphasized the importance of building national-capacity in the area of the environment. Another delegation felt the mandate and scope of work of the Gulf Task Force should be expanded.

Response of the Administration

44. The Director, RBASE, noted that updated documentation would be available for the thirty-eighth session of the Governing Council. He reassured the Committee that not only the countries in the region of the conflict would benefit from the SPR allocation, but, that also countries such as South-Asian and European countries affected by the crisis would also benefit, as required. He also noted that the $4 million SPR allocation was very small considering the needs created - The Gulf Task Force estimated that tens of millions of dollars were needed and he hoped the Governing Council would give full consideration to this issue. The Gulf Task Force had adopted a "demand-driven" approach, based on clear criteria, and responding to requests

from Governments through field offices - such requests were believed to be forthcoming from several countries and would be handled as soon as they were received; collaboration with United Nations specialized agencies had been excellent.

45. The Senior Advisor on Humanitarian Affairs to the Administrator then briefed the Standing Committee on the United Nations inter-agency humanitarian relief operations, under the leadership of the Secretary-General's Executive Delegate. A consolidated humanitarian appeal was expected soon.

VI. ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE FOR PROGRAMME MATTERS TO THE GOVERNING COUNCIL

. At its ... meeting, on ... May 1991, the Standing Committee for Programme Matters adopted the present report.